

# The Mercury News

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## Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education survives budget cuts: Fall semester starts Wednesday

By **DONNA JONES**

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WATSONVILLE — Some classes will cost a little more. Others will be slightly shorter in duration.

But Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education will open Wednesday for the new school year with a full slate of courses despite losing more than half its funding.

Students will be able to work toward a high school diploma, improve their English or learn new job skills in the computing, construction, culinary or medical fields.

"We're trying to take some fiscally conservative actions and get this thing going and keep it going," said Director Nancy Bilicich.

That was good news to Ana Merino, a 30-year-old Watsonville resident who registered for classes Monday. Merino picks raspberries in season, and prepares shipments of cut flowers the rest of the year. She said she wasn't a good student when she was younger, and she married at 17. Today, she realizes the importance of an education.

She said her boss at the cut flower business encouraged her to go back to school, offering to promote her to an office job that would get her out of the fields for good.

"I want to get another better job, but I need to know more about computers and speak more English," she said.

Looking ahead, Merino said she also wants to make sure she has a better grasp of English by the time her 2-year-old, Sergio Nathan, is a teenager so she'll have the resources to help him reach his goals.

"Most teenagers speak English, and if he's speaking English with his friends, I want to understand," she said. "I'm so lucky now to have this opportunity."

In June, after the state cut strings on some pots of restricted money, Pajaro Valley school leaders grabbed \$1 million in adult school funding to prop up finances for its kindergarten through 12th-grade program. That was in addition to the \$650,000 they snapped up the previous year.

Pajaro Valley wasn't alone in cutting adult school funding.

"Almost every single one has taken major cuts," said Debra Jones, administrator of adult education at the California Department of Education. Eight schools have closed statewide, and others saw enrollment drop precipitously.

Jones said all the data isn't in for the last school year, but between 2008-09 and 2009-10, statewide adult school enrollment dropped by more than a third to 776,000. Some programs, such as those aimed at older adults fell by more than two-thirds, and career and technical education dropped by almost half. The Pajaro Valley program served 5,200 in 2010-11, down by nearly half from its peak, according to Bilicich.

The cuts left the adult school with \$1 million in operational funding, plus a \$922,000 million reserve. According to Brett McFadden, the district's chief business officer, the adult school will spend a quarter to a third of its reserves this year as officials continue to revamp the program.



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Bilicich said she's trimmed minutes off some classes to save on salaries for instructors, who are paid by the hour. She's also upped the cost of fee-based classes to cover expenses. The increase varies depending on how much each class costs, but a Croatian language class that was \$80 for eight weeks last year will run \$90 this year.

Classes aimed at helping high school students make up credits and English as a second language classes will continue to be free.

## IF YOU GO

Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education

WHAT: Adult Education offers a range of academic, vocational and enrichment classes.

WHEN: Fall semester starts Wednesday

WHERE: Green Valley Center, 294 Green Valley Road, and Institute of Language and Culture, 320 Rodriguez St., Watsonville

DETAILS: [waae-pajaro-ca.schoolloop.com](http://waae-pajaro-ca.schoolloop.com)



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